

Opening Statement of Carolyn B. Maloney
House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on Government Management, Organization, and Procurement
9/11 Health Effects: Federal monitoring and Treatment of Residents and Responders
Washington, DC
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First, I want to thank my good friend and fellow New Yorker, Chairman Towns, for holding this hearing on the health effects of 9/11. I understand that it will be the first in a series of hearings in this subcommittee, and I look forward to working closely with the chairman on this issue.

We will never forget September 11th. We will never forget the dense plume of black smoke of burning jet fuel and we will never forget the enormous dust cloud of toxic pollutants. They follow us here today.

Hundreds of thousands of people—including first responders; rescue, recovery, and clean-up workers; volunteers from all 50 states; and area residents, office workers, and school children—were exposed to those toxins, and we will hear from two of them today: Marvin Bethea, a paramedic who survived the collapse of both towers and John Sferazo who worked as a union iron worker in the massive cleanup efforts. I want to thank John and Marvin for sharing their stories and illnesses directly related to 9/11.

But John and Marvin are just two examples. A peer-reviewed study by the World Trade Center Medical Monitoring Program released last year found that 70% of 9/11 responders have suffered from respiratory ailments and 60% are still sick. Among those screened, over 40% do not have health insurance and over 20% more are underinsured. Dr. Herbert from the World Trade Center Medical Monitoring and Treatment Program will be updating us on her work with rescue, recovery, and clean up workers, whom she treats day in and day out. Thank you, Dr. Herbert, for being here today and for everything you do for the heroes of 9/11.

And Dr. Prezant is here today representing the New York City Fire Department, which previously published a study documenting a 12-year lung capacity loss, on average, among New York City firefighters who responded to the World Trade Center.

There's no disputing that the health effects of 9/11 are real, and we have two other doctors that can attest to it today: Dr. Reibman who has been dedicated to the treatment of area residents, workers and school children at Bellevue and Dr. Kleinman representing the NYPD, both of whom run programs with no funding support from the federal government.

Dr. Herbert, Dr. Prezant, and Dr. Reibman all represent the absolute best health care we can offer the heroes and heroines of September 11th. They deserve no less than care from Centers of Excellence with occupational health doctors who are specializing in the medical monitoring and treatment of those exposed to the toxins of 9/11. Deputy Mayors

Gibbs and Skyler make clear how important Centers of Excellence are in their report to Mayor Bloomberg, and how we must continue their current monitoring and treatment, and expand it to include all those affected by the toxic air. Thank you for being here, Deputy Mayor Gibbs and Deputy Mayor Skyler, to talk about Centers of Excellence, in addition to all your other well-researched findings and recommendations. The information in your report about the costs of helping those sick from 9/11 will be crucial as we go forward in this fight.

And so, we are inevitably here to talk about the bottom line, to talk about funding. Many of us here in Congress have been fighting for funding for over five years, and I want to make clear again here today that I will not stop fighting until everyone exposed to the toxins of 9/11 is medically monitored and all those who are sick get treatment. We need a comprehensive, coordinated plan to make it happen, and we have to follow through.

To start with, we need to make sure that the programs already in place have enough money to continue through the end of the fiscal year.

I am pleased that Dr. Agwunobi and Dr. Howard are with us. I have a number of important questions for both of you today. But the last time we met was a little over two months ago at a meeting in New York where I learned that federal funding for the treatment through the World Trade Center Treatment Program is expected to run out some time in the summer this summer. I also learned that letters will have to be sent out months before funding runs out notifying the hundreds of participants that their treatment will end. Supposedly, these letters are going to give participants time to set up other health care options. But for the vast majority, there is simply nowhere else to turn for the particular care and treatment that they need. I am extremely concerned that these letters could have devastating effects on people when they find out that their treatment, in many cases their only hope for living, will come to an end because their government just doesn't care.

Since that meeting, I am pleased to say that things have gotten a little better—but just a little. The Administration has, for the first time ever, included \$25 million in funding in their FY2008 budget for health treatment for sick and injured 9/11 responders. My good friend Rep. Fossella was instrumental in this breakthrough. However, \$25 million is simply not enough. It is clear that much more remains to be done.

I understand that the 9/11 Health Taskforce will finally be coming up with a plan by March. That plan should include responders, area workers, residents, and students. It should also continue the current program of Centers of Excellence so that we can maintain the highest, standardized quality of medical monitoring, treatment, data collection and research. The heroes of 9/11 deserve no less.

I said it a year ago today, and unfortunately, I'll have to say it again now: Too much time has passed while our federal government has sat on the sidelines to watch the heroes of 9/11 become more and more sick. The time to act is now. As the 9/11 responders will tell you, their life very well may depend on it!